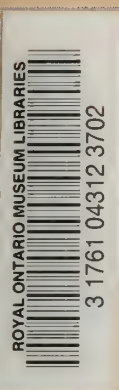


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Royal Ontario Museum



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Cuir doré Hangings in the Royal Ontario Museum

Ladislav Cselenyi

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Cuir doré Hangings in the Royal Ontario Museum

Like stone, wood, textile, metal, glass and other substances, leather has from time immemorial been used as a ground for painting. Such paintings are not to be confused with *cuir doré*, which usually consists of gilt leather pieces (or carrets) decorated by embossing, punching and painting.

The Royal Ontario Museum has acquired two important *cuir doré* wall hangings, the larger (Pl. 1) 518.3 x 274.4 cm., the smaller (Pl. 2) 265.5 x 266.8 cm. Mr. Heribert Hickl-Szabo, Curator of the European Department, discovered them in the possession of the Lindpaintner¹ family, from whom the ROM acquired them.

There is no doubt that the ROM hangings represent a kind of work which developed gradually from the classical types of *cuir doré* known in Spain as "Guadamaciles," in Flanders and Germany as "Korduan leather," in France as "Corduan leather" or "Peaux d'Espagne," and in England as "Spanish leather" or "Corduan leather." The term "Guadamaciles" covers the entire product of the Moorish tanners of Ghadames in North Africa, and like "Corduan" or "Cordovan" is a synonym for fineness.² The art was brought to Spain by the Moors, and undoubtedly originated in the East.

While the earlier type consisted of a number of carrets of the same or different design sewn or later glued together, in some 17th and 18th century hangings the carrets are parts of one unit of design, representing a painted scene. The ROM hangings belong to a type in which the carrets are glued together, then gilded, punched and painted. In the process of restoration it was found that the carrets were cut from calf skin of varying quality,³ the thicker from older animals, the softer and thinner from younger ones. The leather was tanned red, but with the passage of time has turned brown on the back, which is typical of old leather. The gilding, punching and painting were executed on the flesh side. There is no sign of moulds or metal plates having been used for embossing, nor even for very low relief.

The leather itself is an indication of date, because calf skin was used only in the later periods, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries. By that time Spain, where chiefly goat or sheepskin were used, had lost its preeminence in the field,⁴ and Malines, Brussels, Antwerp, Venice, Paris, Rouen, Marseille and Avignon had become the chief centres of the manufacture. This was partly the result of a development in the technique of *cuir doré* decoration: in the 17th century a process was invented (probably a Flemish achievement) for embossing leather with wooden moulds in a press. Although it was only a mechanical improvement on the ancient technique of moulding dampened leather, it so speeded the process that embossed hangings became characteristic of the entire industry until economic pressure brought about



Plate 1 *Cuir doré* wall hanging, 518.3 x 274.4 cm. (ROM 969.179a)



Plate 2 Smaller *cuir doré* wall hanging, 265.5 x 266.8 cm. (ROM 969.179b)

the increasing popularity of wallpaper and other more practical means of covering and decorating interior walls. In Malines, for example, a single workshop making gilt leather hangings employed over 120 workers,⁵ including painters. A single woodblock, made by a woodcarver or sculptor from an artist's design, cost from 600 to 1000 gulden⁶ (about 175 to 290 Canadian dollars).

Economy was not the only reason for enterprise and inventiveness among the manufacturers; changes in the public taste and in the artistic expression of the period led this widespread industry to import new motifs from the Far East. One result was that, besides the regular manufacture of "genuine" types of leather hanging (embossed, gilded, punched and painted), less expensive types were made, closer perhaps to the taste and means of the consumer. The monotony of vertical and horizontal rectangularly cut carrets of similar size was broken by painting the joins, so that the geometrically divided fields disappeared. The surface of the leather became a plain smooth ground,

ready for decoration by punching and painting. This is how the carrets of the ROM hangings were prepared.

The larger hanging consists of fifty-seven pieces 88.9 x 66.1 cm. and 86.4 x 61 cm., the pieces along the upper edge measuring 88.9 or 86.4 x 22.9 cm.; the smaller of twelve carrets of more uniform size.⁷ Despite stringent regulations anent the size of the carrets,⁸ it is no wonder that hangings of the ROM type, which did not depend on blocks or plates for embossing, had carrets of various sizes. If it was impossible to cut a carret from a single piece of skin, it was permissible to glue pieces to it in order to cut a carret of the required size. During restoration a number of such adjustments were found on the ROM hangings, chiefly at corners or edges of carrets, and a few small pieces were found to have been added in an earlier restoration (on the larger hanging there were eight of these). The pieces of leather were glued together by the usual technique, the edges bevelled and placed one over another to form a smooth surface.

Examination of the ROM hangings reveals the use of the classical method of gilding known from ancient times,⁹ described by Theophilus in the early 12th century and by Jehan de Begue in 1431. The gilding is identical with that on genuine Moorish "Guadamaciles" and all the later "Spanish leather," whether made in Spain or elsewhere in Europe. The process differs only in that while the embossed types were gilded, punched and painted carret by carret, and later sewn or glued together, the ROM hangings were gilded after the leather had been prepared as one huge carret. The surface was first coated with thin beaten leaves of silver, then covered with egg white and overpainted with a special varnish. This gave the appearance of gilding, often of a shiny gold colour, but in the ROM hangings a coppery gold tone. The surface was then beaten with the palms of the hands, probably to achieve a uniform golden tone. Although the recipe for the varnish was a closely guarded secret, it usually consisted of pitch and resin, to which aloes, sandarac and linseed oil were added. The mixture was then cooked until the correct shade of gold was reached. In parts of the design the varnish was scraped down and the surface prepared for painting, as can be seen in cracks on the painted parts of the ROM hangings.

Leather hangings were decorated after the design of an artist, and always in contemporary taste. The Spanish makers imitated textile designs, chiefly brocades. Designs with the same motifs, but in several decorative arrangements, appeared all over Europe, and identification of origin is very difficult, though the technique sometimes helps. The relief on embossed Dutch carrets is higher than that made by the moulds of Venetian makers; indeed, some of the Venetian hangings are without relief, simply gilded and painted. The motifs varied from region to region, but always had their sources in contemporary decorative design. The chief motifs in the decoration of leather hangings are figural compositions, flowers and fruits, garlands or bouquets, natural or stylized. Mythological scenes or elements are not unusual, with birds, beasts and butterflies often appearing beside scenes with Bacchus, or in the hunting scenes of earlier origin. The character of the design was



Plate 3 Detail of central motif on smaller *cuir doré* hanging; basket of flowers

usually determined by the destination of the hanging, perhaps the interior of a Baroque hunting lodge, a garden pavilion or — if the motifs of the decoration consisted of a rich Baroque strapwork — a showy state room.

In the 17th and 18th centuries workshops producing the classical embossed type also produced a new type of *cuir doré* hanging, with a free-painted composition of historic scenes or allegorical motifs, and in the 18th century with chinoiserie designs. Judging from their style, the ROM hangings belong to the latter category. The design of both panels is basically the same. The motifs used — bands, foliage, flowers, birds, snakes, arabesques, butterflies and insects — are known from decorative designs of the classical type, especially those from 17th and 18th century European workshops. Punched and painted on a broad surface of gilt leather, the motifs are set symmetrically. The only new motif here is the small Chinese garden pavilion at the left side of the smaller hanging. All the decorative elements and their bearing on the provenance and date of the hangings will be considered below.

The smaller hanging (Pl. 2: 969.179b) is square in shape, and about the same height as the larger (Pl. 1: 969.179a). The design is built up around the central motif, a large basket of flowers (Pl. 3) on a stand supported by fantastic scrolling foliage in convex and concave curves.¹⁰ This imaginative stand grows out of a narrow horizontal strip painted in colour ranging between brown and blue, indicating the ground. The foliage is painted in varying shades of blue, thickly applied white, and red, probably shades of Chinese

red and scarlet vermillion. These are the basic colours of the hanging, and with various shades of brown are used throughout.¹¹ Scrolling foliage frames the hanging, some of the curves being rather stylized, but all in the Baroque idiom. The most remarkable element, showing an attempt at innovation, is the auricular shape of parts of the foliage, which may be seen even in the early 17th century, e.g., in the work of the designer M. M. Mosyn of Amsterdam, about 1620.¹² Parts of the frame embody the pattern of acanthus compositions, known from a panel design of 1685,¹³ by Daniel Marot. A stylized leaf in the middle of the frame at the top, repeated elsewhere, is reminiscent of a thistle leaf, a feature of acanthus ornament as it passed from Renaissance into Baroque, undoubtedly influencing the development of Rococo ornament.¹⁴ Another pattern for these components is to be found in the stylized wings of dragons and devils, resembling bats' wings, introduced by the designer Johann Ulrich Krauss.¹⁵ This foliage ornament is related to that seen in 17th century lace, especially needlepoint (Point de France) of about 1680,¹⁶ in which we find types of curved and scrolled ornament with some indications of the developing elements of the later Rocaille.

Another characteristic element of the design is the garland of flowers festooning from the upper foliage border, most characteristic of the Louis XIV style, and known from many examples, e.g., Le Brun's festoons of flowers in the Louvre, dated 1655 and 1663.¹⁷ Two rather strange shrubs, no more than single branches, rise diagonally from the lower corners and create a triangle about the basket of flowers, emphasizing the Baroque symmetry of the whole design. They are also, however, an element of chinoiserie, of which an even more characteristic motif appears at the left: the small garden pavilion on a bridge, of Chinese or Japanese derivation. Judging from its size and rather uncertain type, as well as its position in relation to the rest of the composition, it appears that the designer did not ascribe to it the special importance given to it in later designs executed under stronger Chinese influence. In a very real sense the garden pavilion motif is a hint (in the realm of *cuir doré*) of the coming popularity of chinoiserie.

The characteristic balance of the Baroque style is visible in the placing of other motifs and elements of decoration throughout the design. First there are the birds. Two of them are symmetrically set in the foliage at the bottom, one at either side of the central "stand." The one at the left is fantastic. He stands on the right leg, left leg straight out in front, as he eyes a coiling snake with beak and leaf-like ears. The scene is dynamic and vividly executed, and possibly represents Aesop's fable "The Crow and the Serpent," both actors depicted with fantastic attributes. The same scene appears even more expressively on the larger hanging. It was at the beginning of the 17th century that Isaac Nicholas Nevelet, a learned Swiss, issued his third printed edition of Aesop's Fables under the title *Mythologia Aesopica*.

To counterbalance the "Crow," a Heron stands among the foliage at the right. It is a characteristic type known from earlier periods, and like the one on the mark of the late 16th century printer Eusebius of Basel.¹⁸ Above it,

between the “stand” and the sloping branch at the right, is a large bird of uncertain type, seated on a foliage scroll but visibly in motion. Such a bird is found in some late 17th century German designs. This one differs from the other two in colouring; while they are painted in blue and white with shading, its head is red, its body pink and white, with some yellowish strokes. As a counterbalance at the left side of the hanging there is a group of fairly large fruits (pears, apples, cherries and plums) in warm reddish colours, emphasized by a branch rising toward the central basket of flowers. The counterbalance of the two large birds at the right is even more strongly emphasized by a thistle-like leaf, the right side of which supports the fruit, the upper end at the left an ancient type of wind instrument, a buccina-shaped shell. Behind the “Crow” in the left corner this shell ornament occurs again, more interesting because of the volute curve of the auricularly ornamented foliage beside it.

On the sloping branch at the left, about the height of the flowers in the basket, is a bird in a nest. The bird is somewhat fantastic, painted red and blue, with a crest of three small white feathers. Its motion reflects fear of a butterfly above its head, and the scene forms a closed composition. Another small bird is perched at the top of the same branch, its head looking back in a characteristic motion. Red, blue and white are its basic colours, with a white crest like that of the nesting bird. A white butterfly above its head is a component extending the imaginary slanting line of the branch at the left toward the centre of the upper frame. A group of four butterflies is arranged with remarkable symmetry around the central flower basket.

Although the iconographic background of the elements goes back to the 16th century or even to the Renaissance, the style and manner of execution shift the dating of the hangings into the early 18th century. Analysis of the larger hanging will show that it and the smaller are parts of a single unit, and, from the point of view of the characteristic technique of *cuir doré*, inseparable if the most expressive artistic effect is to be achieved.

In the larger hanging (Pl. 1) the motifs as well as the elements and their components are in essence the same as those in the smaller, though the design was composed for a surface more than twice the size. The central bunch of flowers is here set in a classical vase, instead of a basket, but the fantastic “stand” of scrolled foliage is similar, and so is the “frame” of scrolling leaves with festooned garland at the top, and the two tall sloping shrubs, hardly more than branches, growing out of a similarly depicted ground. The shrub at the right has long reddish catkins instead of the roses on the one in the smaller hanging. The ornament has the same auricular features and the characteristic stylized thistle leaf. A strong feeling of symmetry marks this design also, though restoration at some period has strengthened some features of the foliage in a penetrating deep blue and red, so that they give a slightly unbalanced appearance to the whole.

Here the two large birds at the bottom are peacocks, the one at the left standing on both legs facing a snake with bird's head and open red beak. The other peacock, like the crow at the left in the small hanging, stands on the left leg with right leg stretched forward. His neck is bent as he pecks a pair of apples.

The animal in the lower left corner, on a spreading leaf, is a strange mixture of bird and beast. The tail, ending in an arrow, is long and looped; the head, aggressively turned back, has ears and an open beak with arrow tongue (Pl. 4) denoting its dangerous character. It should be noted that the snake with the bird's beak has the same arrow tongue and tail as this bird has. The snake with arrow tongue appears as a decorative motif on a polychrome goblet of St. Cloud manufacture of the end of the 17th century.¹⁹ It has a beast's head with red arrow tongue darting at a flower.

Above and between this fantastic bird and the peacock engaged with the snake is a parrot, seated on a scrolling red leaf with auricular features. At the far right, and slightly higher, is a cockatoo. A small bird perches on a branch of the shrub at left, and beside it are two birds in flight. As in the smaller hanging, there are four butterflies around the central flower vase, but these are rather fantastic and of strange shape. The rich punching ornamenting them has been done with all the delicacy and fineness possible to the technique. The butterfly at the left of this group is depicted in the act of catching a black-painted fly. There is a fifth butterfly above a branch of flowers at the left of the central vase, which delicately fills the space and corresponds to the catkins at the right side.

The design of the two hangings makes it reasonable to suppose that they were made in the same workshop, the larger if anything slightly later, because the Chinese taste is given greater emphasis both in the composition and in some of the motifs, such as birds and trees. A St. Cloud tureen of about 1720, moulded with a fantastic bird among flowers and foliage in the oriental manner, can be compared with our large hanging, with birds on the ground among flowers and foliage. Again, the flying birds of exotic or even fantastic form in our large panel are found in the very earliest European representations influenced by the Far East. One example is a cabinet (960.13) in the ROM japanned in black and gold, of English origin, about 1690. Another is a japanned doll's house, Dutch, about 1720.²⁰ For comparative dating, it is interesting to note the patterns of flying birds and butterflies²¹ on a Nevers pedestal dish of 1660–80 in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and also patterns of Chinese taste on tin-glazed earthenware made in the Guilibaud factory in Rouen in the first quarter of the 18th century;²² here are seen exotic butterflies with bodies curved like dragonflies, and insects similarly depicted. Perhaps the delicate patterns of Japanese Kakiemon porcelain penetrated the Chinese taste in Europe via the trade routes. This influence is visible in the flowers, birds, insects and butterflies on Dutch tin-glazed earthenware tiles by Cornelis Bomeester, of the first half of the 18th century.²³ Designs by Krauss,²⁴ especially in comparison with types of birds and the “bat wing”

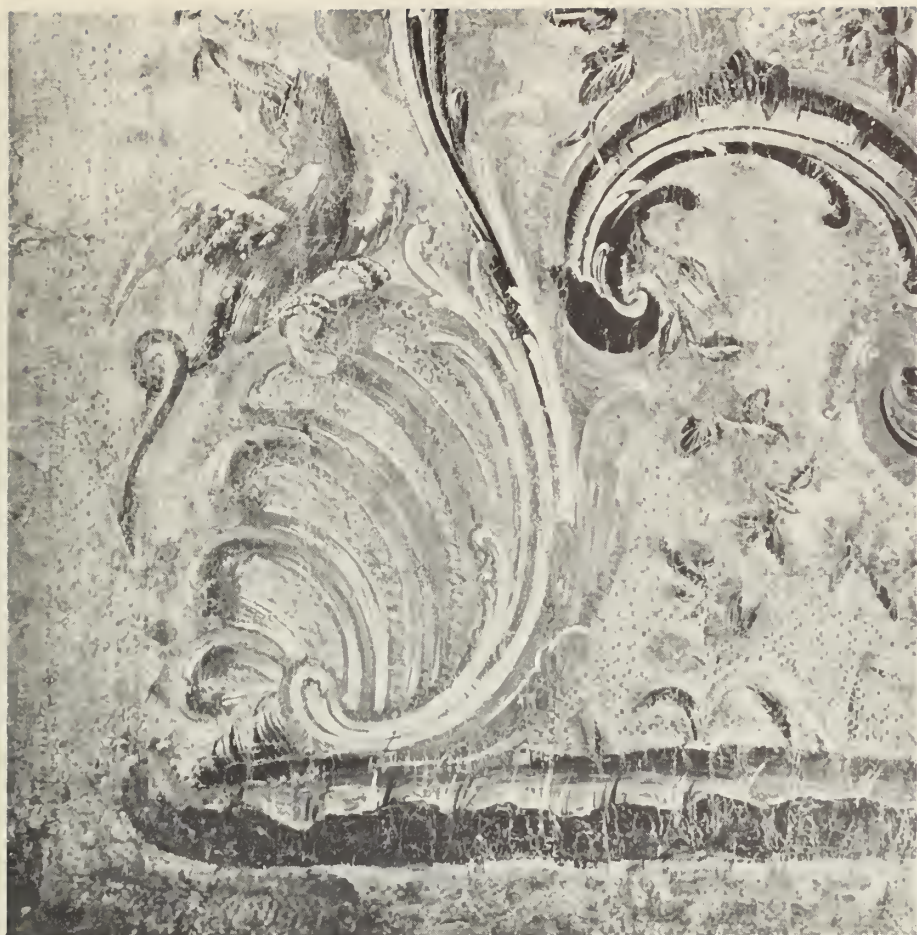


Plate 4 Detail of larger wall hanging, lower left corner; bird-beast animal with open beak and arrow tongue, on scrolling leaf

feature of some of the scrolls in the ROM hangings, demonstrate the heterogeneity of the Baroque idiom before the Chinese taste — the influence of the orient — was felt. His decorative elements are European, expressing or partly expressing the dominant style, though in a mixture of French delicacy and German directness of artistic expression. However, in dating any design on the evidence of Chinese influence, the purpose for which it was made must be considered.

On the question of the genealogy of the type of design used in the ROM hanging, it may be mentioned that the Netherlands East India Company was founded in 1602, and that the Compagnie des Indes was founded in Paris in 1644. These historical events must be considered as the beginning of an influence important not only to contemporary decorative art, but to the whole development of the fine arts, at that time reflecting the influences of two different religious and political trends, the Reformation and the Counter-

Reformation. It is possible that only the latter prevented the evolution of Mannerism into the style which later developed as Rococo. The return to the classical style came in the 17th century, when the asymmetrical balance of forms through contrapuntal compositions was practised by such artistic creators as Borromini, Guarini and Serpotta. The simultaneous appearance of the strange new motifs from the Far East served to counterbalance the current Zeitgeist, expressed in art in terms of unnatural violence. The interest of the public and of leading artists working in the decorative arts was caught by the philosophical implications of designs depicting an idyllic life undisturbed by bloody wars and troubles. Opportunities to see and study the new patterns in blue and white china, lacquer, paintings and many other imported objects inspired the artists to use them in their own works. Sometimes they copied them slavishly, a habit that had not died out when, at the end of the first quarter of the 18th century, designers working in the Chinese taste first ventured to add something of their own invention.

From the motifs, elements and components of the decorative design in the ROM hangings it is possible to judge that their origin is no later than the first quarter of the 18th century. Supporting this hypothesis is the design of the well known Savonnerie tapestries ordered by Louis XIV in 1713, which shows the characteristics of the decorative style prevailing in France in the early years of the century.²⁵ During the Regence period designs became even richer, and floral and foliated motifs and Rococo forms gradually began to appear.²⁶

Another basis for this dating can be found in literature which touches on leather hangings. Clouzot, for example, in his *Cuirs décorés*,²⁷ introduces a printed catalogue of 1712, in which a certain Boissier of Avignon offers leather hangings decorated with "Chinese" figurative motifs. He also illustrates a leather hanging of Dutch origin with "Chinese" decoration.²⁸ One of the more important patterns, from the point of view of the genealogy of the ROM hangings, is a design for an embossed leather hanging in the Chinese style, illustrated in a book by Fougereux de Bondaroy.²⁹ The characteristic motion of one of the birds is like that in the ROM hangings, and so are the butterflies and insects. More interesting is the fan in the right hand of the seated Chinese figure. Its peculiar shape, and especially features of the edge (Pl. 5), are reminiscent of edges of motifs in the ROM hangings, particularly those of the butterfly with swallowtail wings, which are incontestably akin to the bat wing, the thistle leaf and the sea horse-like feature. Considering that the classical type of moulded and embossed *cuir doré* hanging had lost its importance before the end of the first half of the 18th century, this interesting design for an embossed carret of a leather hanging in the Chinese taste may be ascribed to the earliest period of the use of Chinese motifs in the manufacture of *cuir doré*.

Of interest at this point in our argument is the description by Hans Huth³⁰ of a series of hangings in the hall of Schloss Finckenstein in East Germany. "The



Plate 5 Design from Fougeroux de Bondaroy, *L'art de travailler les cuirs dorés* (Paris, 1762)

state rooms of this palace were chiefly furnished by Count Dohna in the early 18th century. The hangings show a form of decoration similar to the paper hangings of the Far East . . . Characteristic of their decoration are such features as big trees with flowers and birds in front of a neutral background; a narrow strip in the foreground shows a kind of garden with figural representation." The ROM hangings are comparable not only as to motifs, elements and some components, but also as to size, although their back-

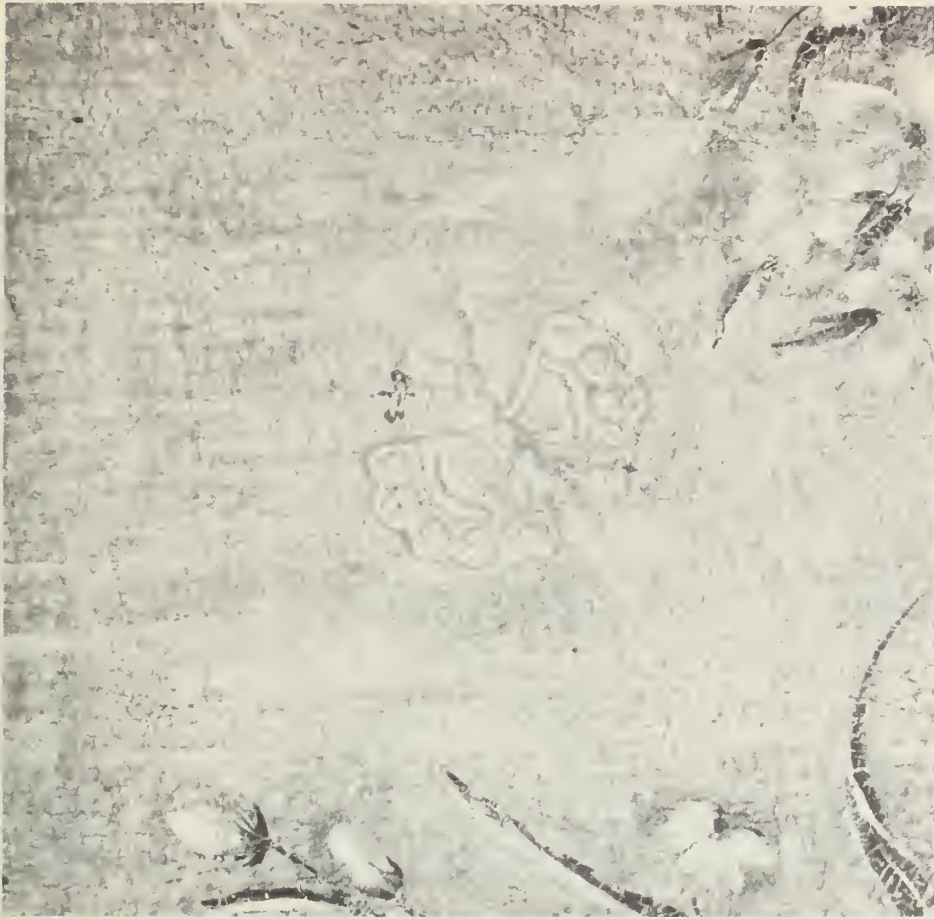
ground is gilt and punched instead of neutral. A very similar design is shown in panels illustrated by Francis Lenygon,³¹ who ascribed them to a Dutch artist during the reign of William and Mary. Going back to Hans Huth, we must be grateful for his emphasis on the flourishing manufacture in England of leather hangings in the Chinese taste, as shown in his "List of London Leather Gilders." Most of the work of these gilders was screens with figural motifs, the only hanging whose artist is known being signed "Coventry, London." Its design differs from that of the ROM hangings: it "shows an ideal landscape with houses, staircases, railings, gardens and fences, arranged in a rather fantastic manner and populated by numerous individuals in that oriental way which fills up the whole space without leaving any room whatever in the sky . . . The borders are decorated with single vases and other objects in the style of the 'symbols of fortune' . . . having skillfully copied single oriental scenes . . ."

On the other hand, a *cuir doré* wall covering, punched and painted, in the Deutsche Leder Museum, has a design influenced by Chinese taste which is akin to that of the ROM hangings. It is 230 x 152 cm. in size, described as only part of a hanging, and ascribed to England in the mid 18th century.³² Another hanging, said to be Malines work, and described and reproduced by A. Jansen,³³ is in the Monastery of the Cellebroeders. Like the ROM hangings, it is remarkable for pierced types of scrolls and auricular curves.

From the naturalistic style and manner in which the design and painting have been executed, the ROM hangings seem to be of Dutch or Flemish origin. However, the obvious German influence indicates that they may have been ordered for use in Germany, and that the designer respected contemporary German design. How penetrating was the influence of the prevailing French style has been shown in the case of Krauss, one of the leading German designers. The meagre elements in the Chinese taste probably reflect in part the traditional character of the workshop or designer who was unacquainted with the new style.³⁴ As in the case of the hangings in the Finckenstein Castle, we should ascribe the design of the ROM hangings to artists who accepted the Chinese taste without abandoning their own artistic expression.

The fact that designs or decorations were repeated in many different workshops turns our attention to the skill of the leather gilder, on which depends the artistic value of the whole piece. A glance at the two ROM hangings shows that the chief characteristic of *cuir doré* work remains even after 250 years: the sparkling effect of the gilt surface is still excellent, proving that the work was done in a good workshop. Most remarkable is the elaborate punching, a truly aesthetic endeavour, achieving a most effective and artistic expression. Punching was used not only to fill spaces between painted parts, but to emphasize the decoration and depict selected objects more impressively.

The uses of punching on the ROM hangings make it clear that this decorative technique is an important element in the whole design. A close study of



Plates 6 and 7 (p. 14) Butterflies, details from larger wall hanging (ROM 969.179a) showing use of different iron patterns as ornamentation

the patterns present on the hangings shows that twenty different types of punching irons were used on the two pieces, and for easier understanding a schematic list of them is appended, numbered for orientation. Basically the patterns fall into two groups. The first is represented by pattern No. 1, used for punching the entire surface (as in the Guadamaciles of Spanish origin) except for those areas punched as parts of decorative ornaments. The punching was probably executed with an iron having five parallel lines within a square measuring 4 mm. on a side. Turning the iron four times produced the final effect of a small parquet-like field. To the second group belong the other nineteen types of pattern, used for the filling of ornaments or as decorative elements accentuating features of branches, leaves, flowers, birds, etc. Most worthy of note is their use in the ornamenting of the butterflies, resulting in different textures and giving life to the whole decoration (Pls. 6, 7). For example iron No. 2, with a pattern of five concentric squares, was used on the large hanging for a particular ornament, filling the space within the foliage scroll above the fantastic bird with the arrow tail (Pl. 8).



Plate 7



Plates 8 and 9 (p. 16) Use of iron with pattern of five concentric squares (ROM 969.179a)

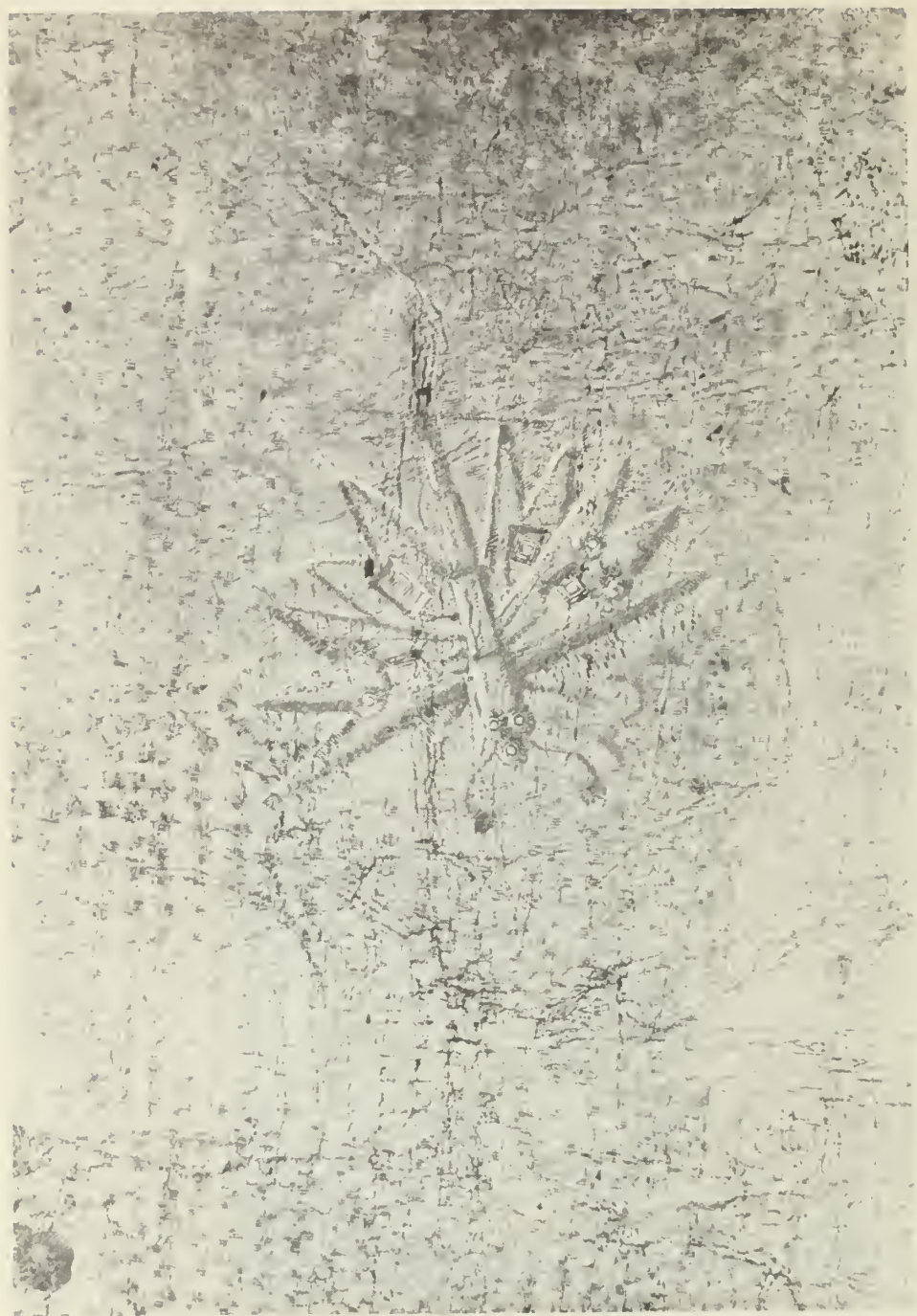


Plate 9



Plates 10 and 11 (p. 18) Iron with horizontal parallel lines (ROM 969.179 a and b)

The same ornament is similarly used in places on both hangings, and as an ornamental element in the decoration of the butterfly which has the most outstanding shape (Pl. 9). And so with the other eighteen patterns, each used for repeated punching of a particular space as a special background for ornament or, as with the butterflies, for very specific expression, and characteristic of them alone.

The next most used iron, No. 7, has a pattern of horizontal parallel lines, slightly wavy and about 13 mm. in length. It was used for emphasizing the drawing of the design, and as a border its effect is very impressive (Pls. 10, 11). First of all the design seems to be executed in low relief. Secondly, the sparkling edges of the ornament give an impression of oriental luxury, the endeavour to achieve which is a natural consequence of the eastern origin of all gilt leather work. The design shows the exotic abundance to be seen in the earliest pieces.

In pursuit of comparable examples the writer visited several museums to examine leather work, most of which proved to be mere carrets or fragments of hangings stored with similar material. Most were late 17th and early 18th century embossed work, but thanks to Dr. G. H. Derveaux of the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels one fragment (Inv. 5345/15, Pl. 12) resembling the ROM hangings (the gilt leather being punched and painted) was found in that Museum. Preliminary notes ascribed it to a local workshop in Holland, of the second half of the 18th century. Like ours, its background



Plate 11

had been punched with an iron having five lines, which, if punched vertically and horizontally, creates a parquet-like field. A close look at the fragment revealed a primitiveness of design and execution, both in painting and punching. Each of the details compared indicated that it was probably part of a *cuir doré* hanging made after a work from some more skilled workshop, and judging from the condition of the material, it was made some decades later than the ROM hangings. (Compare the Brussels fragment shown in Pls. 12, 13 and 14 with details of the smaller ROM hanging in Pls. 3, 15 and 16.)

Tracing the development of *cuir doré* hangings in the 17th and 18th centuries in terms of economic pressures and the influence of rising new tastes in contemporary style, we must observe carefully those evidences which mark the work of skilled and experienced craftsmen. Retaining the classical embossing, and attempting to preserve their former standards, they produced the simpler current type with greater skill than less experienced makers. The latter often worked for those firms specializing in the production of



Plate 12 *Cuir doré* fragment (Inv. 5345/15), Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels

wallpapers, panels, mirrors and "leather hangings decorated in the fashionable taste." The writer noted two fragments in the Musées Royaux, both embossed, but showing also some patterns of irons resembling those on the ROM hangings. One, described as possibly Netherlandish, late 17th or early 18th century (Inv. 4331) shows, among others, irons similar to the ROM's Nos. 2, 17 and 20 (Pl. 14). Executed on a background of similar copper-gold, pattern No. 2 is probably a compound one, achieved by



Plate 13 *Cuir doré* fragment (Inv. 4329), Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels

punching the triangular No. 17 (with horizontal lines) four times in rotation, which results in an ornament of concentric squares. The other (Inv. 4329), characteristically and richly decorated and embossed, is ascribed to the Malines workshop and dated about 1680 (Pl. 13). It also shows, among others, patterns similar to our Nos. 9, 14, 15 and 20. Both these examples, like many others in Liège and Vienna and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, show how elaborate was the work with irons. Work of this quality required no less skill than the earlier work with wooden moulds or iron plates. Not every workshop, however, achieved the highest skill, nor did every product of a

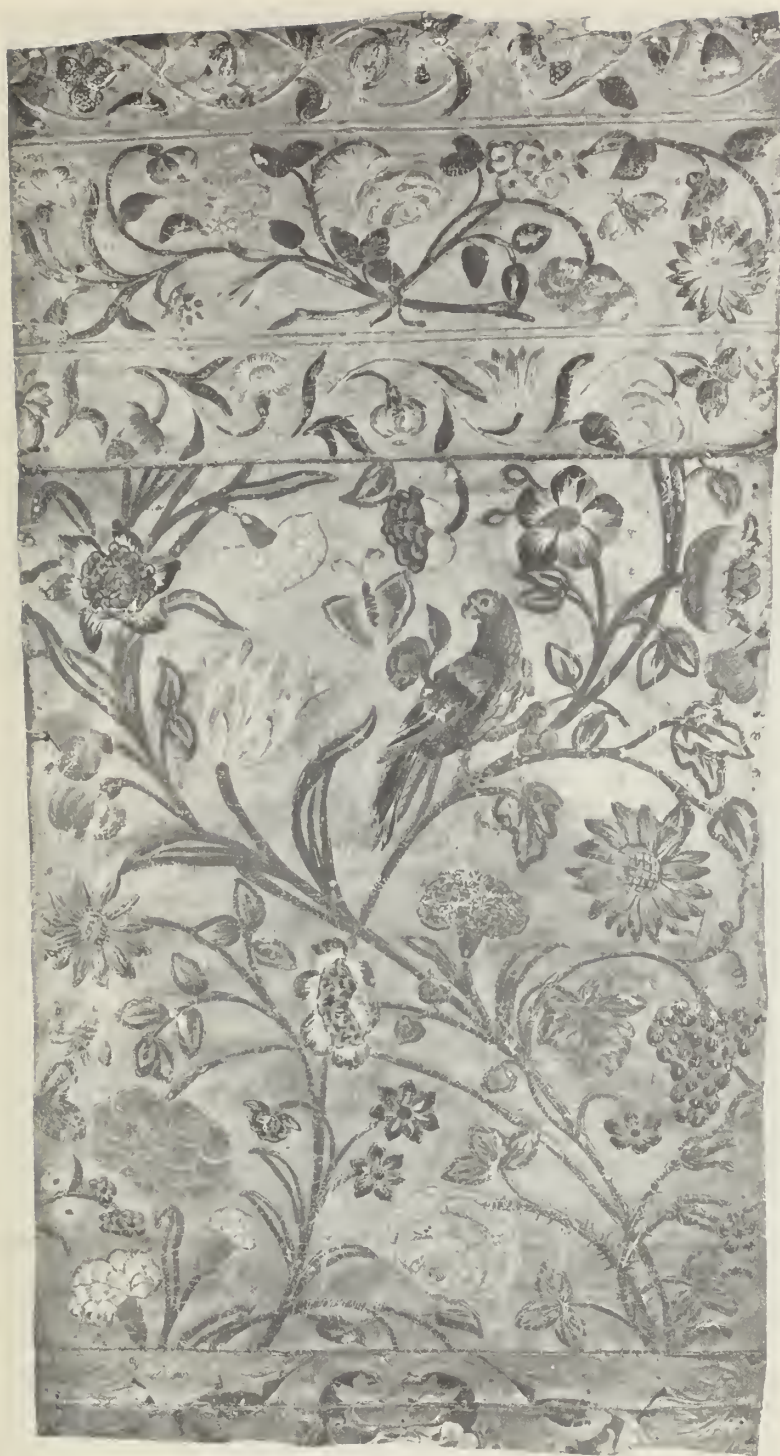


Plate 14 *Cuir doré* fragment (Inv. 4331), Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels



Plates 15 and 16 (p. 23) Details of smaller wall hanging (ROM 969.179b) showing various iron patterns

single workshop achieve success. The difference can be seen in the two Brussels examples, not only in the patterns used but also how and where they are used. If we consider the use of irons for depicting the butterflies,



Plate 16

covering wings and bodies with punched ornament, we realize that it is an attempt to substitute this process for the earlier technique of embossing. The noteworthy use of irons No. 12 and 16, e.g., below the basket of flowers on the smaller ROM hanging, and in the scroll ornament at the lower right corner of the large hanging (Pl. 17) testifies to the endeavour of an artist whose aim was high.

From all these facts we have reason enough to set the ROM hangings in a group representing characteristic *cuir doré* known to have been made and used before the appearance of hangings in the Chinese taste. The characteristic of the latter is that they are decorated by gilding and painting in ground opaque colours in varnish, showing a distinct difference in design and execution. Much work was done in this technique, especially screens, coromandel and lacquered, and leather was sometimes used as a substitute material.³⁵ Finally, judging from the quality of the two ROM hangings and the perfection of artistry and craftsmanship of the gilded and punched leather, it is possible without hesitation to ascribe them to a workshop experienced enough in the old methods to make something usual, but harmonizing with the taste of the latest fashion. It is possible that they were executed at the place for which they were intended, a hypothesis suggested by their size and the difficulty of transporting the finished article. Since the leather was not embossed, the entire preparation and finishing could have been accomplished by workmen *in situ*.



Plate 17 Detail of scroll ornament, lower right corner of large wall hanging (ROM 969.179a)

The several kinds of evidence adduced in this article enable us to establish that the ROM hangings were ordered for the garden pavilion of a castle somewhere in western Germany, and made by a Flemish rather than a Dutch workshop in the first quarter of the 18th century.³⁶ However, it is difficult to establish a more exact attribution; we cannot suggest the name of a designer nor even a specific workshop.

These unique gilt leather hangings in the Royal Ontario Museum, probably the only representatives on the American continent of early 18th century applied arts of this kind, may inspire further attempts to discover something more about the *cuir doré* industry at a period when its classical character was still alive, and the “modern” type was approaching its brief period of popularity.

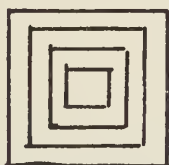
Iron patterns

1



Punched over entire background, except for areas reserved for ornament (see all plates except no. 7).

2



Used as described in the text on both hangings (Pls. 8, 9).

3



A combination of lines and small half globes (possibly applied by rolling on).

4



Probably composite, and used for ornamenting butterflies (like iron no. 3, perhaps applied by rolling) (Pls. 7, 9).

5



As no. 4.

6



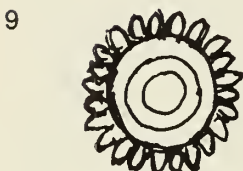
Used for ornaments and butterflies. About 0.12 cm. in diameter (Pl. 9).



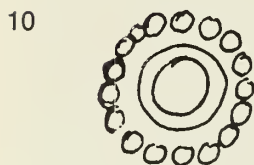
The iron most used, for bordering all features of ornament. About 0.13 cm.



Used on borders throughout the design as a repeat of two small pits in diagonal arrangement. Visible chiefly at lower left side of large hanging (Pl. 8). (Iron no. 14 probably used on borders also.)



Used for ornament at lower edge of basket and in several other places (Pl. 3).



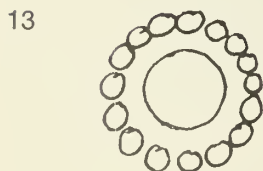
Used to ornament the butterfly catching the fly on the larger hanging, and for several ornamental areas on both. Diameter about 1 cm. (Pl. 7).



Used to ornament the butterflies, particularly the butterfly above the bouquet on the larger hanging, and in other places (Pl. 6).



Used with remarkable effect for the ornament of the scroll at the right corner of the large hanging, and for peacock feathers (Pls. 3, 17).



Used on the butterflies and in other places.

14



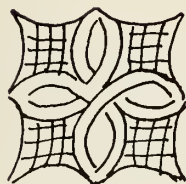
Small pits in combination, used several times.

15



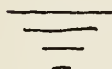
Small half globes, used as No. 14.

16



Most used on both hangings, but especially on the smaller, for the decoration of ornamental areas (Pl. 3).

17



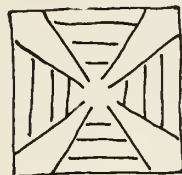
Could be used to form the concentric squares of No. 2, by turning four times.

18



Dovetailed with No. 17, this is used particularly on the small hanging.

19



Used like No. 16 on both hangings.

20



Used several times on both hangings for ornamental areas.

27

Notes

1. Undoubtedly the German family mentioned as possessing a screen in the Chinese taste by Hans Huth, "English Chinoiserie Gilt Leather," *Burlington Magazine*, July 1937, p. 31. Mr. Lindpaintner-d'Almada, an amateur and collector of considerable knowledge, was descended through his mother from a king of Württemberg. He lived in Tegernsee near Munich, where he owned an estate consisting of two large houses in a park-like area. One house he used as a residence, the other for storage and display of his collection. This arrangement, not unusual with dealers, enabled him sometimes to sell material from his own premises. When Mr. Hickl-Szabo visited him in 1967 he was about eighty, and he died a year later.
2. Günter Gall, *Leder im Europäischen Kunsthandwerk* (Braunschweig, n.d.) pp. 295-6.
3. A. Jansen, *Het Mechelsch Goudleer, Zijn Oorsprong and Tecniek* (Mecheln, 1911) p. 11, first use of calf skin. See also p. 29.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 20, expulsion of the Moors from Spain by Philip III in 1610.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 21; Günter Gall, *op. cit.*, p. 298.
8. Günter Gall, *op. cit.*, p. 298. "Das Eichmass wurde von der Stadt aufbewahrt und die Zünfte überwachten oft mit drastischen Massnahmen die genaue Masseinhaltung."
9. Theophilus, *The Various Arts*, ed. C. R. Dodwell (London, 1961) pp. 22, 23. Also Mrs. Mary P. Merifield, *Original Treatise on the Arts of Painting* (New York, Dover Publications, 1967) vol. I, pp. 204-278.
10. This type of "stand" is seen in many designs for early 18th century Aubusson tapestries.
11. Jansen, *op. cit.*, p. 3. He pays much attention to the painting of hangings, describing it as fine work, especially from the aspect of harmony of colours, mentioning the finest transitions from deepest indigo to brightest azure, from intense red to delicate pink. On p. 28 he gives important information on the rich palette of pigments and many kinds of varnish, and mixtures of both, showing how complicated was just one phase of the making of gilt leather hangings. The examples he gives illustrate only the final process of finishing the work with painted decoration and protective coating.
12. Joan Evans, *Pattern: a Study of Ornament in Western Europe* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1931) vol. 2, p. 327.
13. *Ibid.*, fig. 314.
14. A. F. Butsch, *Handbook of Renaissance Ornament* (New York, 1969) Pl. 10. Also A. Speltz, *The Styles of Ornament* (New York, 1959) p. 466, No. 6. This shows a carpet pattern designed by Robert de Cotte for the Manufacture de la Savonnerie at the beginning of the 18th century. On p. 456, No. 4 is a War Trophy in the park at Versailles by François Girandon (1627-1715). Similar patterns with the bat wing, thistle leaf or sea-horse-back feature are visible in the moulded decoration of the LOUIS XIV armchairs and settee in the ROM's Baroque Room, exhibited with these hangings.
15. Johann Ulrich Krauss, *Baroque Cartouches for Designers and Artists* (New York, Dover Publications, 1969), pp. 33, 63. In the Introduction Edward A. Maser speaks of the influence of the French designers, which is evident throughout. "Krauss was able to take advantage of the rich heritage of the 17th century ornament designers of France and Italy, sometimes borrowing from them outright, and sometimes simply bringing them up to date a bit. He seems to be specially partial to the acanthus leaf designs of Lepautre, although the influence of Daniel Marot and Jean Bérain is also evident. One of the reasons why Krauss's *Bilder Bibel* is so important in the history of ornament is that it was the chief vehicle for the spread of the Louis XIV style, as represented in the work of these great designers, throughout Germany." It is not without interest that the first printing of this Bible, from which these cartouches are taken, was between 1698 and 1700, the second in 1700 and the third in 1705.
16. Joan Evans, *op. cit.*, fig. 317.
17. *Ibid.*, figs. 308, 397.
18. Butsch, *op. cit.*, Pl. 204.
19. Collection Connaissance des Arts, *Les Porcelainiers du 18^e siècle Français* (Paris, 1964), pp. 62, 63.

20. Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: the Vision of Cathay* (London, 1961), Pl. 19.
21. Arthur Lane, *French Faience* (London, 1948), p. 12.
22. W. B. Honey, *European Ceramic Art* (London, 1949), Pl. 85.
23. *Ibid.*, Pl. 88. Also *The Encyclopaedia of World Art* (New York, 1959-68), vol. VIII, Pls. 414 and 420 show that patterns of the Chinese taste introduced into Europe can be found in works as early as the T'ang dynasty (618-906). Some objects which show this are a Ch'in musical instrument from China (now in the Shosoin in Nara, Japan), a Chinese lacquer box of the Hsuan-te period (1426-35) depicting birds and butterflies (now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), and a Japanese lacquer box of 1390 (in the Kumano-Hayatama Shrine in Shingu in the Wakayama region of Japan). The butterflies painted on some Japanese *inros* (medicine cases) are also interesting from this point of view, and an 18th century inro signed Shofusai Tosen is reproduced (Item 1493) in the American Art Association catalogue of the sale of the art collection of Heber R. Bishop (January 1906).
24. Johann Ulrich Krauss, *op. cit.*, passim; p. 73, p. 33.
25. Collections Connaissance des Arts, *French Art of the 18th century* (New York, 1957), pp. 163e, 173b.
26. Some of the works of François Cuvillies, especially his work in Munich in the 1730s, are useful for comparison with elements of decoration in the ROM hangings, and as examples of the rapidly developing new style. French contemporary taste and exploitation of style are noticeable in interiors described by Marie-Juliette Ballot in *Le décor intérieur au XVIII^e siècle à Paris et dans l'Île de France* (Paris, 1930). Pl. IX shows the Salon de Musique (1720-25) in the Chateau de Chantilly, where the thistle leaf pattern occurs and some of the blossoms are joined like a string of beads. Even more significant is Pl. XLI, another room in the chateau with painted wall decoration by Christopher Huet of about 1735, in the style known as "la grande singerie," in which the human figures are represented by monkeys.
27. Hans Huth, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
28. *Ibid.*, Pl. XXXVI of Clouzot's *Cuir décorés*.
29. Fougereux de Bondaroy, *L'art de travailler les cuirs dorés* (Paris, 1762), Pl. II.
30. Hans Huth, *op. cit.*, p. 32. There is a resemblance between the early 18th century Finckenstein hanging and a design for a bedroom in the Chinese taste as a developed style. The latter is dated about 1750, and is in the Victoria and Albert Museum.
31. Francis Lenygon, *The Decoration and Furniture of English Mansions during the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (London, 1909), pp. 142, 144.
32. Günter Gall, *op. cit.*, p. 308, fig. 239.
33. A. Jansen, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
34. The unbalanced style, from the aspect of Chinese taste, expressed in the ROM hangings can be compared with a contemporary design by Claude Gillot (1673-1722), which shows many elements of ornament closely related to ours. See William H. Schab's *Sale Catalogue 27 of French and Italian 18th century drawings and prints* (New York, n.d.), p. 38, 39.
35. Hans Huth, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
36. Günter Gall, *op. cit.*, p. 307. If we consider once again the fact mentioned by Gall, that besides genuine leather hangings the 17th and 18th century workshops turned out many similar works in which the artistic characteristics were more expressive, it is possible to place the ROM hangings among those made for export in a Malines workshop. It is possible to see through cracks that the colour of the ground under the paint is a dark blue or green, and this also indicates the characteristic treatment of leather in Malines workshops. See Jansen, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

